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22 September 1980

MEMORANDUM

PROSPECTS FOR ESCALATION OF IRAN-IRAQ CONFLICT

Military Indicators

The military signs point toward further escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict. The surprise attacks on Iranian airfields obviously changed the scope of the conflict in a major way. The attacks are an attempt to quickly and decisively gain air superiority--an area in which Iraq feels Iran has an edge--so that Iraq can take advantage of its superiority on the ground. We do not believe that this or previous actions reflect a preconceived plan with a precisely defined schedule and objectives. Rather, Iraq appears to be making the most of Iran's current weakness and its own initial tactical successes. In the current context, then, the air strikes strongly suggest that Iraq will now conduct a major ground offensive into Iran. [REDACTED]

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We cannot define the limits of the probable offensive and indeed, the Iraqis may not yet have a clear definition of its objectives. Their goals will probably be influenced by the effectiveness and extent of Iran's response. We anticipate border crossings of battalion and even brigade-sized units, primarily into Iran's Kuzhestan province, but look for the deepest penetration in the central border area--Khanaghi, Mandali, and Merhran. [REDACTED]

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We believe that the Iraqis will limit their objectives to force Iran ultimately to recognize their border claims. We do not expect Iraq to attack or occupy population centers or

This memorandum was prepared by analysts in the Office of Political Analysis and the Office of Strategic Research. Information as of 22 September 1980 was used in its preparation. Questions and queries may be addressed to Deputy Chief, Southwest Asia Analytic Center. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
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[redacted]

industrial and economic facilities unless provoked by similar attacks from Iran. There are large areas of Khuzhestan which could be effectively occupied by Iraq without much ground resistance from local Iranian forces. [redacted]

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Ground Forces--Balance

Iraq presently has a significant edge over Iranian ground forces all along the border from Khanaqin to Basra. [redacted]

[redacted]

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We do not believe that Iraq would have any difficulty sustaining an occupation force of division size in Western Kuzhestan. Even if the one Iranian and one Iraqi divisions were fully engaged, we believe that logistics would not be a constraint on Iraq. On the other hand, in the short run, Iraq probably would have difficulty sustaining the multi-division operations that would be required to seize and hold all of Kuzhestan. [redacted]

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Iran has virtually no capability to sustain military operations at a high level of intensity. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Iran's Air Force, although at less than 50 percent of its pre-revolution level of combat capability, presents the greatest threat to Iraqi forces. Even so, the Air Force probably could not sustain combat operations for more than a week. [redacted]

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Iran's capability is also restricted by a shortage of spare parts and a lack of access to a reliable foreign supplier. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

The Iraqi Air Force, to a greater degree than the Army, depends on Soviet support for major maintenance and parts. The Iraqi Air Force could not maintain large-scale air operations of any duration without resupply from the USSR. [REDACTED]

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Political Indicators

There seems little prospect for an early end to the Iraq-Iran fighting unless Iraq scores a quick military victory. Baghdad appears determined to use all necessary force to restore its sovereignty over disputed border areas, including establishing buffer zones on Iranian territory in order to force Iranian recognition of Iraqi border claims. Iran, for its part, does not seem ready to submit to Iraqi bullying to redraw the border, especially along the Shatt al-Arab. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Baghdad's immediate aim is to redress border grievances. The Iraqis, however, appear to have miscalculated Iran's will to resist and now find themselves in a situation in which they are being forced to expand the conflict in order to secure their original limited objectives. Fighting has now spread to the Shatt al-Arab region, an area of great economic significance. Iraq has already targeted Iranian oil installations in Khuzestan for retaliation in the event of an Iranian strike on Iraqi oil facilities near Al Basrah. [REDACTED]

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Two other issues promise to keep tension high for some time. Iraq seeks an early end to the current Tehran regime and will continue its strong support for Khomeini's political opponents as well as Iran's dissident ethnic minorities, especially the Arabs of Khuzestan province. There is some speculation that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's Arab leadership aspirations might eventually lead him to back the creation of an independent Arab state in Khuzestan with strong ties to Iraq. Baghdad might also seem intent on forcing Iran to restore to the UAE three small islands located near the Strait of Hormuz occupied by Iran in 1971. [REDACTED]

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